



Stage

Seceding Expectations

by [J. Cooper Robb](#)

The Great Northeast Through May 6. \$10-\$20. Adrienne, 2030 Sansom St. 215.592.9560

We're moving on up to the East Side, and so are they. In Pete Kimchuk's riotous new play *The Great Northeast*, currently receiving its world premiere from 1812 Productions, the all-American sitcom family is on the move, this time making a beeline out of Hunting Park and up Roosevelt Boulevard to the all-white, plastic-encased enclave known as the Great Northeast.

In the early 1980s, Philadelphia's bond rating was in the sewer, spurring residents of Northeast Philadelphia to consider a break from the city. Twinka McDaniels, the overworked, overstressed and delightfully over-the-top head of this ethnically diverse brood, is leading a petition drive for secession. Full of wacky antics and absurd circumstances, much of the play's action is straightforward situation comedy, though to his credit Kimchuk at least takes a stab (albeit not a particularly successful one) at commenting on both the personal and social boundaries so arbitrarily established in modern America.

Populating this home that is literally and figuratively on the brink of collapse are the foul-mouthed Grams (Babs Pinto), gangster boyfriend (Harry Philibosian), **brilliant but rebellious teen** (Sharon Eisman), her African-American boyfriend (Howard Overshown) and her mother, Twinka, gloriously played by the exquisite Jilline Ringle.

Though Kimchuk's eccentric characters are more types than real people, **the play is brilliantly cast** by director Pete Pryor, and in each case the superb ensemble toys with their stereotypes in hilarious fashion. Pinto knocks down lewd one-liners with all

the expertise and gusto of a veteran barfly, Philibosian looks like he just walked out of the Joey Merlino trial **and Eisman/Overshown are every Mayfair mother's worst nightmare.**

And then there's Ringle, who may be Philadelphia's most engaging actress. Like all great actors, Ringle always appears to have been born to play the role, in this case a Princess Diana-worshipping single mom naively searching for a better life. And while the play falls apart a bit at the end with its dark John Waters humor and sociopolitical babble about white flight, Ringle stands tall in delivering a performance that carries yet never dominates this extraordinarily funny production.